



Michigan school accountability system called 'strong' in report advising against letter grades

high school hallway

New research from the University of Southern California and North Carolina State University says Michigan's school accountability system has strengths compared to other states. (*File photo*)

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LANSING -- A **report from researchers** at the University of Southern California and North Carolina State University recommends states move away from the idea of A-F letter grades for schools as they design accountability systems, and says Michigan's system has benefits.

The report, published in the journal *Educational Researcher*, evaluated accountability systems in the 42 states and the District of Columbia that have received waivers from federal "No Child Left Behind" rules.

The systems were judged based on transparency, reliability, fairness and "construct validity" -- which the authors describe as whether or not the systems cover the desired set of outcomes and inferences based on results from the system are appropriate when classifying schools.

Michigan and Massachusetts were recognized as having the strongest "construct validity" in the report because their systems focus on performance in subjects other than math and language arts.

"States with systems among the strongest in construct validity include Massachusetts and Michigan -- each uses subjects other than mathematics and ELA for accountability purposes, uses non-test-based measures for priority and focus classifications, and measures proficiency using points along the distribution. Michigan also equally weights test results from mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies," the authors wrote.

The portion of Michigan's system that determines "focus" schools based on a "performance gap" between high-scoring and low-scoring students was also highlighted in the report as making the system fairer to diverse schools.

The report recommends states avoid creating "composite measures" that aggregate accountability data into a single value, as Michigan presently does with its color-coded system, and as a proposed A-F letter grading system for the state would do.

"To improve both transparency and construct validity of classification systems, states should reevaluate the construction of composite measures and their use for identifying schools. While A-to-F systems are, on the surface, transparent, the underlying design of these systems involves a great deal of arbitrariness that makes it difficult for educators and parents to understand performance," the authors state.

The chair of the House Education Committee, Rep. Lisa Posthumus Lyons (R-Alto), has **introduced a bill** now pending before her committee that would replace the state's accountability system with an A-F grading system similar to one used in Florida. Hearings on that proposal are set for Tuesday and Wednesday.

Lyons has called Michigan's system "ambiguous and unclear for those unfamiliar with the ranking formula" and claims the proposed letter grading system would "provide parents with a solid sense of the school's performance."

The Michigan State Board of Education and State Superintendent Mike Flanagan issued a joint statement Tuesday morning opposing the Lyons proposal, saying replacing the accountability system "will only add confusion and frustration to an already stressed system."

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**Joint Statement by State Board of Education and
State Superintendent Mike Flanagan on HB 5111 and HB 5112**

The State Board of Education (SBE) and Michigan Department of Education (MDE) share the Legislature's interest in a clear effective, and non-duplicative school accountability system that accurately gauges school performance and guides improvement efforts. To those ends, the SBE and MDE have integrated school accreditation requirements defined in state law; federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements; and now, an approved NCLB federal waiver into a unified accountability system.

The SBE welcomes legislative interest in improving Michigan's public school system by shining a spotlight on important topics, such as third grade reading proficiency. We further welcome working with legislators regarding important elements of any system, including simplicity and clarity; the use of letter grades versus color-coding; and ensuring the system includes key factors like student growth measures and multiple measures of student performance.

The SBE, however, cautions against placing prescriptive methodologies and metrics in state law. For this reason, we oppose HB 5111 and 5112 as currently written. While we all agree that reading comprehension is of vital importance, House Bill 5111 focuses on mandatory student retention without specifying the need for school practices that reduce failure rates and provide intervention for retained students. In addition, the SBE is concerned that House Bill 5112 mandates an inflexible accountability system that may not meet future federal requirements and reduces the flexibility needed to develop long-term improvements.

The SBE believes that specificity regarding the state's school accountability system and metrics should continue to reside with the Michigan Department of Education. The Department works to continuously revise and improve its methodology, using experts, stakeholders and public comment to ensure the system is fair and useful for Michigan students, families and educators.

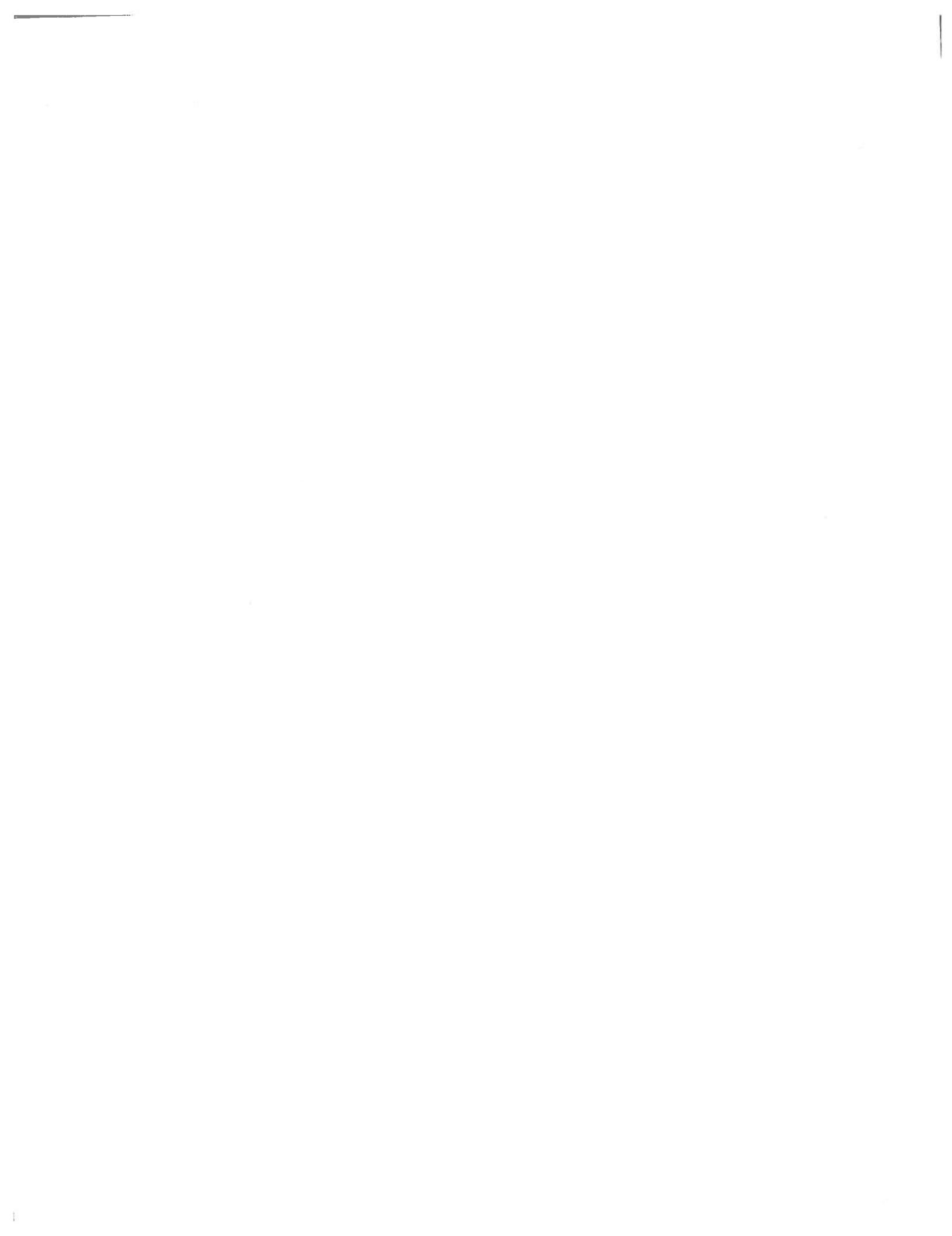
Michigan's current accountability system has been in place for just one year. It allows the flexibility needed for improvement. Replacing this new system instead of making thoughtful adjustments to it would only add confusion and frustration for schools in a time of significant K-12 educational change. The SBE welcomes the opportunity to work with the Legislature and all stakeholders on ideas for improving Michigan's current accountability system. Replacing it will only add confusion and frustration to an already stressed system.

This statement is individually agreed-to by all eight members of the State Board of Education and State Superintendent Mike Flanagan.
November 5, 2013

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Michigan's School Accountability System

House Education Committee

November 5, 2013



Michigan's Accountability System

- * All Michigan schools receive:
 - * A ranking on the statewide Top-to-Bottom list.
 - * Based on achievement, individual student growth or schoolwide improvement, and achievement gaps in math, reading, science and social studies.
 - * Relative ranking – depends upon how other schools perform.
- * A scorecard color on the Accountability Scorecard
 - * Based on meeting career- and college-ready proficiency or growth targets in all five subjects and all student groups.
 - * Based on a series of proficiency targets.

Top to Bottom list – why *this* metric?

- * Simple does not necessarily equal fair or accurate.
- * Measuring something as complicated as school performance requires complexity.
- * We know this from experience:
 - * Example: original TTB, only two subjects--schools and districts said it didn't account for all factors --> we added three subjects and graduation rates
 - * Example: Focus schools were impacted by "outliers" (extreme high or low scores); we applied statistical techniques to minimize impact
- * These changes added to the accuracy of the metrics but also to the complexity.

Top to Bottom (TTB) list as diagnostic tool to help schools improve

- * What's the overall pattern?
 - * Low achievement?
 - * Declining achievement?
 - * Large gaps?
- * Where are the actionable areas?
 - * Which subjects need the most attention?
 - * Is everyone doing poorly or are some students doing well and others falling behind ?

Additional accountability designations

- * Some schools receive an additional designation:
 - * Reward School (342 schools)
 - * Top 5% of schools in the state
 - * High Improvement Schools
 - * Beating the Odds Schools
- * Focus School (349 schools)
 - * 10% of schools in the state with the largest achievement gaps
- * Priority School (137 schools)
 - * Bottom 5% of schools in the state

The outcome of priority and focus designations...

Priority Schools

- * 27% of 2012 Priority Schools increased their TTB ranking to 5th percentile or above in 2013.
- * In 2010, MDE began the Persistently Lowest Achieving (now Priority) designation. In 2013, 45% of these schools are not found on the Priority Schools list.

Focus Schools

- * In 2012, 358 schools were named to Focus Schools list; 173 were not designated Focus in 2013. Of these 173 schools, 153 schools narrowed their within-school achievement gaps in 2013.

Michigan School Accountability Scorecards

- * These scorecards replaced the Adequate Yearly Progress report cards in 2012 through the ESEA Flexibility waiver
- * Five components make up a School or District Accountability Scorecard:
 - * Student participation on state assessments
 - * Student proficiency and growth on state assessments
 - * Student graduation OR attendance rates
 - * Educator effectiveness label reporting and teacher/student data link reporting rates
 - * School Improvement Plan reporting and school diagnostic reporting

Michigan School Accountability Scorecards

- * Schools and districts must meet targets in the Scorecard components for the school/district as a whole and for the bottom 30% of student achievers as well as for any student group that has a minimum of 30 students:
 - * Race/ethnicity categories
 - * Limited English Proficient
 - * Students with Disabilities
 - * Economically Disadvantaged
- * AYP was a Pass/Fail; the scorecards replaced this with one of five colors: green, lime, yellow, orange and red
- * The colors are based upon meeting targets in the different scorecard components

Consequences of accountability....

- * Top to Bottom list ranking is a consequence.
- * The bottom 5% goes under supervision of the State Reform Officer (SRO), as outlined in state law.
- * School districts have 90 days to pick an intervention model and plan; then they have 3 years to implement.
- * At any time, if they are not making progress, the SRO can move the district into the statewide school reform district.
- * Scorecard color is a consequence.

Michigan's ESEA Flex waiver

- * Michigan's current ESEA Flex waiver is in effect until the end of this school year (2013-2014).
- * Applications for renewal are due in January 2014.
- * USED waiver guidance requires that Michigan determine and publicly post:
 - * A list of Reward, Focus and Priority schools; and
 - * A system that measures progress against proficiency targets for all students and student groups.
- * Any new waiver application would require these items and the signature of the State Superintendent.

House Bill 5112

- * The bill intrudes on our appropriate authority by eliminating the ability for the department to do its work by preventing any other school or teacher transparency system.
- * There is no mention of Priority, Focus or Reward schools that is required under ESEA flexibility.
- * The new section (1280f) overprescribes a system of accountability in lieu of our current system, which is not acceptable to the department and the majority of stakeholders.
- * The bill makes it potentially impossible in subsequent years to ‘right’ the grading to an honest accounting of school performance.

House Bill 5112

- * We appreciate the transparency requirements of the legislation as we believe shining light on the data drives improvement in schools.
- * MDE supports the language regarding alternative education campuses as this is something we've been working on adding to our accountability system.
- * Delaying the implementation seems plausible as we move towards an improved state mandated assessment that will more accurately provide data on school and student performance.

Michigan School Accountability Resources

- * For more information on Michigan's school accountability, visit the following:
 - * www.mi.gov/ttb
 - * www.mi.gov/priorityschools
 - * www.mi.gov/focusschools
 - * www.mi.gov/rewardschools
- * Scorecards: http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-22709_25058--,00.html

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